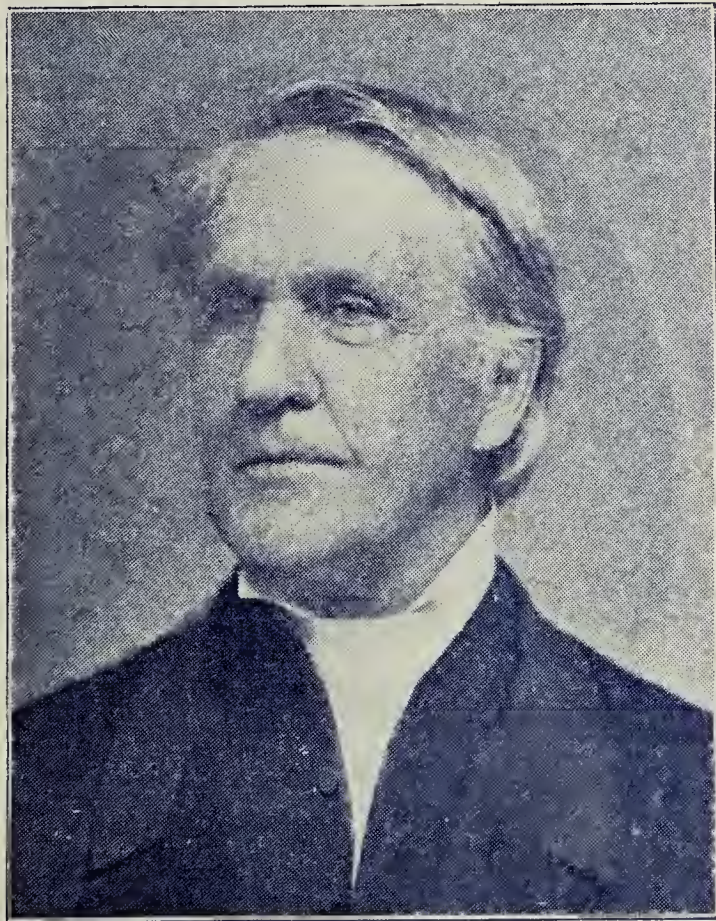


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PIONEER SERIES.—No. II

TITUS COAN

OF HILO, HAWAII

BY
MRS. Q. W. SCOTT

Price 2 cents

WOMAN'S FOREIGN MISSIONARY SOCIETY
OF THE
METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH
36 BROMFIELD STREET
BOSTON

TITUS COAN

of Hilo, Hawaii



AMONG the heroes and heroines who have brightened the Island World by their faith and works, the name of Titus Coan deserves our special thought. He was born in Killingworth, Connecticut, February 1, 1801, in one of those blessed New England homes where "plain living and high thinking" prevailed. Educated in the district school, and later in a neighboring academy, he began to teach at eighteen. For several years this was his occupation, but finally he was fully convinced that he was called to be a foreign missionary. He entered Auburn Theological Seminary for necessary study, but before graduating was called to Boston to be ordained and sent on a mission of exploration to Patagonia.

There was no "open door" in Patagonia, and he returned in one year, was married to the love of his youth, Miss Fidelia Church, and the next month, December, 1834, they sailed away to the Sandwich Islands.

Travel was slow in those days, and, with only brief stops by the way, they did not reach Honolulu until the sixth of June. Mr. Coan then found that he and his wife, with Mr. and Mrs. Lyman, who were returning after a short absence, were appointed to Hilo, on the southeast coast of Hawaii, which they finally reached on June twenty-first.

Words failed to express the beauty of this "gem of the ocean." First they saw a spacious harbor, its crescent-shaped beach divided by three streams of pure water. Stretching inland to the bases of the mountains the landscape was arrayed in "living green." And such a wonderful variety of tints! Plumes of the lofty cocoa and royal palm, rustling leaves of the mango, breadfruit, tamarind, rose-apple and other trees mingled their foliage with luxurious vines and many tinted flowers, under the bright sun and soft breezes of the tropics. Back of all rose the lofty, snow-capped mountains, Mauna Kea and Mauna Loa. It seemed an earthly paradise compared with New England, but the beauty-loving natures of Titus Coan and his bride found no New England home awaiting them.

Missionary work had been begun by a Rev. Mr. Goodrich, but he soon left the island, and into his house, the only frame building in Hilo, our friends moved. The Lymans soon built a comfortable home near them, and as they had been there two years before this, were able to teach the language to the eager new-comers.

At the end of three months Mr. Coan went into the pulpit with his teacher and preached his first sermon.

And now, as Mr. Lyman gave himself to the task of educating the native

boys, the real lifework of Titus Coan began, with only twenty-three Christians as a nucleus. His parish was the shore belt, from one mile to three miles wide, but running back sometimes five or ten miles, with little villages scattered all along the coast.

The population was at that time about 15,000. The natives were well-formed, brown-skinned, and wore only a slight covering of bark-cloth. Mr. Coan found them naturally amiable, generous, hospitable and patient in poverty; but full of superstition—with hidden forms of idolatry—indolent, fickle, untruthful and dishonest. He says: "The Hawaiian is an unfinished man."

The people were all slaves to their chiefs, no man but a chief owning "land, tree, pig or wife!" There were in Hilo no roads, bridges or horses, so Mr. Coan made his tours on foot. His path was a simple trail winding up and down precipices so steep as to prove dangerous. But the streams were his greatest obstacles. He says: "I had several ways of crossing them. First, when the waters were low and the rocks bare, I leaped from rock to rock with the help of a stout stick. Second, when they were not too deep, I waded. Third, when too swift, I mounted upon the shoulders of a sturdy, aquatic native, holding on to his bushy hair while he crept down the slippery bank and moved slowly among the slimy boulders until, after a perilous trip, he landed me safe, with a shout and a laugh, on the opposite bank." Several times he narrowly escaped death. But from the first Mr. Coan won the confidence and love of the natives, and in a few months began to see remarkable results of his teaching.

Late in 1836 he started to make a tour of the island with two or three natives. On the western shore was Puna, where he had been once before. No sooner had he reached this place than the people came in crowds to "hear the Word." They gave him no time to eat and but little to sleep. They brought the sick, the crippled and the little children, as in the days when the Master taught in Galilee. On Sunday, multitudes gathered at Puna, and with tears and great joy gave themselves to God. Among the converts were the high priest of the volcano, and his sister, the priestess. When Mr. Coan returned to Hilo the interest continued to increase as hundreds flocked in from Kau and Puna. They built little cabins and actually planted vegetables that they might stay at this most remarkable camp-meeting ever known.

The great native house of worship, two hundred feet long, was quite too small, and of their own accord the people collected material, saying: "We will have a second house of worship that all may be sheltered." For two years this wonderful demonstration continued, not only at Hilo but throughout Hawaii. The result was an ingathering of seventy thousand. At Hilo alone 7,382 were received into the church, after careful "sifting."

These were happy but anxious days for our missionary. Believing "the miraculous work" was God's own, he still felt the responsibility of guiding and watching this people who had no literature, no Christian fathers and mothers, and whose natures were so prone to evil. But Titus Coan was no ordinary man, and as "pastor of the largest church in the world" he demonstrated the fact.

Mrs. Coan opened a boarding school for girls in 1838, the people again gladly building a house "the like of which was never seen before or since." When the children had no paper or slates, a square of banana leaf and a stick made an outfit! At this time the Bible and a few text books were all that had been translated into the Hawaiian. The schools, of which several were soon organized, had a pleasant custom of meeting for social enjoyment. The children, dressed in uniform and marching to music, went through simple exercises, and often sang songs composed by the natives themselves, the day closing with a feast for all.

The first church buildings were not substantial and soon grew shabby; so in 1840 they decided to build a frame church. All the men who had axes went into the forest to cut and hew the timber. Then hundreds of men and women went to bring it in. The captain arranged them in two lines, bark ropes in hand, and gave the command: "Grasp the ropes, bow the head, blister the hand, go, *sweat!*" and away they rushed over rocks and streams till they heard the welcome cry: "Halt, drop drag-ropes, rest!"

Such strenuous exertion—which may hold a lesson for us—was duly rewarded in the completion of the first framed church in Hilo. It would seat two thousand on the earth floor.

Very early in their Christian life Mr. Coan taught his people to be benevolent. At first their gifts were a little arrowroot, dried fish, or a stick of firewood; but when money came into circulation they gave as freely of it. The custom was to have each donor come to the pulpit and place his gift on a table. Says Mr. Coan: "I have seen mothers bring their

babes, or lead their toddling children, that these little ones might deposit a coin upon the table. If at first the child clung to the shining silver, the mother would shake the baby's hand to make it let go its hold."

In those prosperous days the collections often amounted to \$200 in one month. Thus developed a fine missionary spirit, and from this and other Hawaiian churches missionaries were sent to the Marqueses Islands. Then they planned a mission to Micronesia in connection with the American Board. But for this they needed a ship that could be used for missionary purposes alone. So to Titus Coan belongs the honor of suggesting that the children of the United States build such a vessel. This suggestion pleased the Hawaiian mission, and also the Board at Boston. The Sunday school children far and wide became enthusiastic, the money was given, the "Morning Star" was built, and in April, 1857, the beautiful schooner reached Honolulu.

The children of Hilo had given freely for the ship, and were watching for her. Suddenly, on the seventh of July, they heard the cry: "Hokuao! (Morning Star) Hokuao!" echoed and re-echoed from hill and valley. Multitudes of children awoke and ran shouting to the shore. Away in the east floated the beautiful ship, its flag flying, a shining star in its centre. That was a glad day for Hilo.

Mr. Coan went to visit the Marqueses on the "Star," and on these islands saw the ferocious, tattooed savages, who yielded so slowly to Christian influences. His purpose was largely to see and encourage the missionaries who had gone out from Hilo, but he was also greatly cheered

in meeting those who, like himself, had long labored in comparative solitude.

A very interesting description of the great volcanoes, Kilauea, and Mauna Loa, is given in Mr. Coan's "Life in Hawaii." He says of the former: "It is within the limits of my parish, and as my missionary trail flanks it on three sides I may have observed it one hundred times, but never twice in the same state." This volcano was the "Home of Pele," a former greatly feared goddess. Mauna Loa was in active eruption four times during the years of his service, pouring out its destructive torrents of lava upon the ill-fated country.

Mr. Coan's first visit to the homeland was made after he had been in Hilo thirty-five years. He soon returned, and a few months after, his faithful, helpful wife died and was buried in her "dear Hilo." Four children remained, but away at school, as so many missionaries' children must be. A few years later Mr. Coan married Miss Lydia Bingham, a daughter of one of the first missionaries to the Sandwich Islands.

After the wonderful scenes of his early ministry, and during his later years, Mr. Coan saw many changes in Hawaii. Dread diseases, the coming in of other nationalities especially Chinese, brought complications, which weakened and depleted the native churches. But to the last his faith was unflinching. "Riding out among the little settlements, he would summon his people around him by his well-known call: '*Aloha oukou*' (love to you)" giving to each special, fatherly care. Early in December, 1882, his beautiful earth life ended. Inscribed upon the marble slab which his people erected are the words: "*He lived by faith. He still lives.*"